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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a research project that examined nonnative Southampton University (England) students' attitudes to continued language learning and the importance of language learning and cultural adaptation. A survey was administered to pre-sessional and in-sessional students that included information on background, past and present language learning, life in the United Kingdom, and area of academic studies. Information from 92 completed questionnaires revealed that most respondents preferred to be surrounded by family; students were most conscious of improvement in everyday listening, followed by speaking in everyday contexts and listening for academic purposes; living in an English-speaking country greatly improved English language skills; and most subjects adapted quickly to academic studies in a foreign language, especially in comprehension of textbooks, journals, and lectures. It was generally found that these students wanted more contact with native speakers of English, especially social and academic contacts. (Contains 11 references.) (NAV)

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Language Learning within Academic Constraints

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LANGUAGE LEARNING WITHIN ACADEMIC CONSTRAINTS

George M. Blue

INTRODUCTION

There is a much quoted body of research that purports to show that language teaching makes little or no difference to the learning process and that students in higher education will make just as much progress in language by working at their subjects as by attending language classes (e.g. Upshur, 1968; Mason, 1971). This is, incidentally, a view held by a number of colleagues in different subject areas and possibly even by a number of EAP specialists themselves. It is, of course, generally believed that language learning probably takes place when there is 'a rich linguistic environment for the intuitive heuristics that the normal human automatically possesses' (Chomsky, 1968, p.690) or that acquisition takes place when learners receive appropriate input, as Krashen has put it (e.g. 1982, p.21). But the suggestion that teachers can best direct their efforts towards managing the linguistic environment or providing appropriate input seems to undermine the teaching role that many would intuitively consider to be valuable. Perhaps more importantly, it would also appear to undermine the role of conscious language learning at a sophisticated level, which studies such as Naiman et al (1978) have shown to be so important.

Even if the speaking and listening skills can best be developed by suitable exposure to and practise in using the language (for a large number of learners at least), it is hard to believe that this automatically applies to reading and still less to writing. In fact, learning to write is one of the areas where self-directed language learning seems to face a considerable challenge and it is an area where many EAP tutors feel that they have a lot to offer and where their teaching skills can be put to very good use. Moreover, there is a substantial body of research that supports this view (see discussion in Ellis, 1986, p.224–229).

As I have considered this vexed question over the last few years, my own observation has been that, whilst students following our pre-sessional course (twenty-eight contact hours a week) often make a great deal of progress in a fairly short length of time, this rate of language improvement does not normally continue through the rest of the academic year, when they are no longer receiving language teaching on anything like the same scale. Sometimes it is even a question of damage limitation – making sure that students whose spouses arrive at the end of the pre-sessional course do not lose too much of what they have learnt. Whereas the pre-sessional course can help students to develop their overall language proficiency, making progress on a number of fronts simultaneously, in-sessional courses (one to five hours maximum per week) must have much more modest aims and can generally only hope to develop one or two skill areas. Moreover, they can only hope to do even this if students are motivated, attend regularly and do the work set in between classes. Given a reasonable amount of effort on the part of students though, even mixed ability classes, with as many aims as there are students in the group, can hope to have some success in a number of precise areas and particularly in developing study skills, academic writing style, etc.

Partly because of my personal commitment to self-directed language learning, but partly also because of an awareness of the limitations of in-sessional classes, I have tended to think that students who continue to make significant progress during the year would be those who engage in some independent language learning. However, whilst this seems very likely, it remains unproven.

Perhaps an even more important factor in facilitating continued language improvement during the academic year though is the degree of integration or acculturation which takes place. It seems very reasonable to suppose that students who use English all the time and who are assimulated into the community of native speakers will continue to make considerable progress. There is, of course, some evidence of this from other sources (e.g. Schumann, 1978). However, I do not know of very much research relating to how the use of English in international EFL and ESL communities might facilitate further language improvement. A number of very firm friendships are formed during pre-sessional courses and to a lesser extent later on, often between people of very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. And these friendship are often very important to overseas students, many of whom, I suspect, may make very few English friends and may never see the inside of a British home. This is borne out by Geoghegan's survey of overseas students at the University of Cambridge: "For many students, the foreign population, whether native or non-native speakers of English, was their 'lifeline', providing social equilibrium in their lives ... In the overseas group, my informants seemed, for the most part, to find what they felt was missing in the host population: warm, supportive, tolerant attitudes (partly, of course, because these students were going through similar experiences) and the possibility of open and unrestricted human relations ..." (Geoghegan, 1983, p.216).

Some very useful research into the factors affecting the performance of students on our pre-sessional course has been done by Wright (1988). Her paper summarises some of her findings, dealing with the role of factors such as age, motivation, previous language learning experience, cultural background, feelings experienced and problems encountered upon arrival in Britain, and attitudes to the pre-sessional course. This paper will look at a number of similar factors, but at a later stage in the academic year. The questions which it would seem useful to address are: Do students make significant progress in their language during the normal academic year or is such progress limited to the pre-sessional period? If they do continue to make progress, what are the factors which influence this? And how important is it to continue to make progress in language anyway? Perhaps there is a stage where study skills are more important than language proficiency.

This paper then reports on a research project which attempts to discover students' attitudes to continued language learning and to the importance of language learning and cultural adaptation as part of the overall experience of studying in Britain. A questionnaire survey was undertaken to try and develop a profile of overseas and EEC students who had either attended the University of Southampton's pre-sessional course in 1988 or registered for in-sessional classes during 1988–89 or both. One hundred and ten copies of a ten-page questionnaire, modelled to some extent on the approach outlined in Geoghegan's (1983) study, were distributed as follows:

Pre-sessional only	24
Pre-sessional and in-sessional	20
In-sessional only	66

After two reminders, ninety-six completed questionnaires (or 87.3%) were returned. Unfortunately, four of these arrived too late to be included in the analysis of results.

Before looking at the results of the questionnaires, I would like to urge two notes of caution. Firstly, the number of respondents is relatively small and it would be dangerous to make too many sweeping generalisations on the basis of such a small

survey. This is particularly true when we come to look at sub-groups of respondents (e.g. all the Middle Eastern students, all the undergraduates, etc.). Moreover, the respondents are to some extent self-selecting and their answers may not be typical of those who chose not to respond for one reason or another. Secondly, this is a questionnaire study and people do not always answer questionnaires with 100% accuracy. I know of at least three respondents who indicated their sex wrongly and, whilst I have been reasonably sure of my ground in making corrections here, I have not generally been able to correct other responses which may give a false impression. Huff (1973) tells the story of how a judge in India once told an eager young British civil servant: "When you are a bit older, you will not quote Indian statistics with that assurance ... what you must never forget is that every one of those figures comes in the first instance from the *chowky dar* [village watchman], who just puts down what he damn pleases" (p.72). I fear I may have a number of village watchmen among my respondents!

A very large number of findings have emerged from this study and there is great scope for showing the degree of association between different factors. In the space available though, it will be necessary to be fairly selective. The four areas that I shall concentrate on are: general background, language learning (past and present), life in the UK and, finally, the area of academic studies. I shall endeavour to show the degree of association between various factors where this is appropriate, although the connections are not always as clear-cut as might have been hoped. For the purposes of this paper, I shall look particularly at how different national groupings have answered the various questions. However, there are potentially many other interesting groupings of students and we could equally well have looked at the responses of students grouped according to age, subject of study or a number of other factors.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

First of all then, we look at general background and it seems convenient for this to divide the respondents into four groups (Table 1). Students have been grouped according to their country of origin, as coming from Europe and Latin America, South Asia and Africa, East and South East Asia, and the Middle East. Although there is great cultural diversity within some of these groups, there is at least a certain similarity of linguistic background. The European and Latin American group is somewhat larger than the others, but all four groups are large enough to make some degree of generalisation possible.

The age of the students varies considerably from region to region (Table 2) and it seems reasonable to suppose that this may affect both acculturation and language learning. The youngest group are the Europeans and Latin Americans, with 54.1% of them being 25 or under and 91.9% being 30 or under. Next come the Middle Eastern group, with 71.4% being 30 or under. The group from East and South East Asia are somewhat older, with only 16.7% being 25 or under and 50% being 30 or under. By far the oldest group though are those from the Indian sub-continent and Africa, with only 23.5% being 30 or under and 76.5% being over 30.

We come now to look at the marital status of the various groups (Table 3) and, as might be expected, find that this ties in with age to a considerable extent: the older students tending to be married and the younger ones tending to be single. Thus, the European, Latin America and Middle Eastern students are predominantly single, whilst the East and South East Asians and the South Asians and Africans are mostly married. It might be reasonable to assume that the European, Latin American and

Table 1: **GEOGRAPHICAL/CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS OF STUDENTS**

GROUP 1		GROUP 2		GROUP 3		GROUP 4	
Europe and Latin America		**South Asia and Africa**		**East and South East Asia**		**Middle East**	
France	(10)	Bangladesh	(4)	China	(7)	Bahrain	(1)
Germany	(8)	Pakistan	(7)	Hong Kong	(4)	Egypt	(1)
Greece	(3)	Sri Lanka	(1)	Indonesia	(6)	Iran	(1)
Hungary	(1)	Ethiopia	(3)	Japan	(2)	Jordan	(1)
Italy	(1)	Nigeria	(1)	Malaysia	(1)	Libya	(1)
Netherlands	(1)	Tanzania	(1)	Singapore	(1)	Palestine	(1)
Norway	(1)			Taiwan	(1)	Saudi Arabia	(4)
Portugal	(1)			Thailand	(2)	Turkey	(4)
Spain	(4)						
Sweden	(2)						
Cyprus	(2)						
Bolivia	(1)						
Brazil	(1)						
Colombia	(1)						
TOTAL: 37		TOTAL: 17		TOTAL: 24		TOTAL: 14	

Table 2: **AGE OF STUDENTS**

	-25	26–30	31–40	41–50
Europe/Latin America	54.1%	37.8%	8.1%	0%
South Asia/Africa	5.9%	17.6%	70.6%	5.9%
East and South East Asia	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%	0%
Middle East	35.7%	35.7%	21.4%	7.1%
TOTAL	32.6%	32.6%	32.6%	2.2%

Table 3: **MARITAL STATUS**

	Single	Married Accompanied	Married Unaccompanied
Europe/Latin America	81.1%	10.8%	8.1%
South Asia/Africa	29.4%	29.4%	41.2%
East and South East Asia	25.0%	29.2%	45.8%
Middle East	71.4%	7.1%	21.4%
TOTAL	55.4%	18.5%	26.1%

Middle Eastern students, being mostly single and generally younger, will be better able to integrate with the British student body and will not be weighed down by the preoccupations of family life. Nearly 30% of respondents from East and South East Asia and from South Asia are accompanied by spouses and in many cases also by children. This does, of course, bring certain benefits, as some of them were keen to point out:

> "I do not feel homesick. I need not to cook food." (Bangladesh)
>
> "I have to give time to my kid and my wife. On the other hand, I get cooked food and washed clothes." (Pakistan)
>
> "It would be very difficult to have an ideal performance without my wife in the UK." (Brazil)

However, it also causes a number of problems, which we need to be aware of:

> "I can't avoid speaking Chinese/Japanese/Portugese."
>
> "Accommodation, especially for the people who coming not in beginning of term." (Indonesia)
>
> "Because my wife does not speak English, I have to be with her in every case, i.e. shopping, health centre appointment for her or children, etc." (Libya)

Generally speaking, the respondents seemed to think that the advantages of having their spouse (and family) here outweighed the disadvantages. This was particularly true of the South Asians, Latin Americans and Europeans, though, of course, only a small percentage of Europeans were married. A very large number of unaccompanied students mentioned the problem of loneliness and homesickness – and some were very conscious that their separation was for at least a year and, in some cases, considerably longer. A few did recognise the benefits that the separation could bring though:

> "That causes me homesick sometime, but I can study freely." (Thailand)
>
> "Sometimes I feel homesick, but, since I have many friends in here, I can reduce my homesick." (Indonesia)

LANGUAGE LEARNING

We shall look first of all at the language learning background of the students prior to their arrival in Southampton. One of the surprising findings was the fact that over half of the respondents claimed to have had an English-medium education. The question was phrased quite clearly: "Before you came to Southampton were there any stages of your education which took place *through* the medium of English (i.e. studying most or all subjects using the English language)?" The results are reported in Table 4. 45.8% of the East and South East Asians claimed to have received some of their education through the medium of English, whilst all of the South Asians and Africans in this group had had an English-medium education of one sort or another. These results correspond quite closely with what might have been expected. Just under half of the Middle Eastern students claimed to have had their tertiary education in English and, whilst the question of what exactly is meant by English-medium education in the context of some Middle Eastern universities certainly needs addressing, this response is probably not surprising. None of the Latin Americans claimed to have been educated through the medium of English. The really surprising result though was in the group of European students, whom one would not normally have expected to have received an English-medium education. Yet over 35% claimed to have been educated in English. It would seem that either there are some

inaccuracies here or the approach of 1992 has been making itself felt in the European school system to a greater extent than in the British system.

Table 4: **ENGLISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION**

	% who received EME	Primary	Secondary	University/ College	Other
European/ Latin America	35.1%	10.8% mean 4.0 years	24.3% mean 4.8 years	16.2% mean 2.4 years	5.4%
South Asia/ Africa	100.0%	23.5% mean 3.3 years	76.5% mean 5.7 years	94.1% mean 4.6 years	11.8%
East and South East Asia	45.8%	8.3% length unknown	16.7% mean 5.5 years	45.8% mean 2.1 years	4.2%
Middle East	50.0%	0%	14.3% mean 3.5 years	42.9% mean 3.7 years	0%
TOTAL	52.2%	10.9%	30.4%	42.4%	5.4%

We come now to consider the study of English as a subject. As Table 5 shows, nearly 80% of respondents had learnt English at secondary school, while over 60% had either started or, more commonly, continued their English language learning at university. Of course, the number of hours per week devoted to learning English may have been very small, as some respondents were anxious to point out. It is also worth mentioning that some 40% of East and South East Asian and Middle Eastern students had not learnt English at school, which may mean that they have spent rather less time overall learning English than some of their colleagues.

Table 5: **WHERE WAS ENGLISH LEARNT?**

	Primary	Secondary	University/ College	Lang. School (own country)	Lang. School Course (UK)	Other
Europe/ Latin America	21.6%	89.2%	35.1%	27.0%	16.2%	5.4%
South Asia/ Africa	35.3%	100.0%	94.1%	5.9%	29.4%	0%
East and South East Asia	20.8%	62.5%	79.2%	41.7%	20.8%	0%
Middle East	14.3%	57.1%	64.3%	28.6%	50.0%	14.3%
TOTAL	22.8%	79.3%	62.0%	27.2%	25.0%	4.3%

Table 6 shows that the mean length of time spent studying English ranges from 5:11 years (Middle Eastern group) to 14:0 years (South Asians and Africans). However, this conceals an individual range from just a few months to thirty years. It is perhaps surprising that a student could have spent as long as thirty years studying English, but this figure was given by two respondents. At the lower end of the scale, four students had studied English for one year or less (one from Latin America, one from Indonesia and two from the Middle East) and a further seven had only been learning the language for between 1:1 and 3:0 years (two from Latin America, one from Indonesia, one from China and three from the Middle East). Unless such study is very intensive, which in most cases it does not appear to have been, we might well wonder whether this is an adequate preparation for advanced study through the medium of English. In this context it is perhaps worth noting that, whereas 45.5% of respondents from the Middle East and all three of the Latin American students had studied English for three years or less, none of the South Asian or African students had less than six years of English study behind them.

Despite the fact that some of the respondents had already been learning English for a very long time, they still either felt the need or had been advised or required to attend language courses. Table 7 shows which language learning options had been taken advantage of.

European and Latin American students had predominantly followed in-sessional courses, but not the pre-sessional course. There were more students from this group who claimed to have done some individual language learning, though the mean weekly length of time spent on it (3.4 hours) was lower than for any of the other groups. Only a very small percentage joined the Students' Union conversation scheme.

Nearly two-thirds of the South Asian and African students had attended the pre-sessional course, with slightly more opting for the eight-week than for the four-week course. Over half had followed in-sessional courses, but the majority of these had only followed one course and in quite a number of cases it was a course run as part of their MSc. Only about a third claimed to have done any individual language learning and only one member of this group had joined the conversation scheme. As English is a second language for nearly all of them and as all of them had already had at least part of their previous education in English, it is perhaps not surprising that many had done no more than was required of them either by their sponsors or by their departments. It may be that, in many cases, the real need was for developing study skills rather than language improvement.

The East and South East Asians are quite a mixed group in terms of their previous language learning background. While a few have learnt English as a second language, for the majority it is very definitely a foreign language – and over 25% have studied the language for five years or less. Surprisingly, fewer than half of this group followed the pre-sessional course and most of these only attended for four weeks. On the other hand, 75% attended in-sessional courses and this was the only group where a substantial number (41.7%) took part in the conversation scheme, indicating a certain desire to integrate with British students.

The Middle Eastern group had the highest percentage (71.4%) attending the pre-sessional course, mostly for eight weeks, and the lowest number (50%) attending in-sessional classes. Over half claimed to do some individual language learning and one enterprising respondent considered that he spent thirty hours a week on this activity, which cannot leave much time for anything else! This accounts for the very

Table 6: **NUMBER OF YEARS SPENT LEARNING ENGLISH**

	‹5 years	5:1–10 years	›10 years	Mean
Europe/Latin America	22.9%	60.0%	17.1%	7: 8 years
South Asia/Africa	0%	40.0%	60.0%	14: 0 years
East and South East Asia	27.3%	54.5%	18.2%	8: 5 years
Middle East	54.5%	27.3%	18.2%	5:11 years
TOTAL	24.1%	50.6%	25.3%	—

Table 7: **LANGUAGE LEARNING IN SOUTHAMPTON**

		Europe Latin America	South Asia Africa	East and South East Asia	Middle East
Pre-Sessional Course	8 weeks	0%	35.3%	16.7%	50.0%
	4 weeks	13.5%	29.4%	29.2%	21.4%
	TOTAL	13.5%	64.7%	45.8%	71.4%
In-Sessional Classes	1 course	40.5%	41.2%	33.3%	7.1%
	2 courses	29.7%	11.8%	37.5%	35.7%
	3 courses	18.9%	0%	4.2%	7.1%
	TOTAL	91.9%	52.9%	75.0%	50.0%
Individual Language Learning		62.2%	35.3%	45.8%	57.1%
Mean No. of Hours/Weeks		3.4	4.9	6.0	7.2
Conversation Scheme		5.4%	5.9%	41.7%	7.1%

high mean number of hours for this group. The mean for the other Middle Eastern respondents is only 3.9 hours per week.

Students were asked how the various language learning activities had helped them and, from the responses, it was possible to work out which activities had helped in the most ways (Table 8). In-sessional language classes seem to have helped in the least ways, partly presumably because they only aim to help in a small number of precise areas, but perhaps partly also because the students have so many other demands on their time that they cannot afford to devote enough time and effort to this kind of activity at this stage in the academic year. One European student commented that the levels in the in-sessional classes were not sufficiently diversified and clearly felt that he personally would benefit from more advanced classes. It is, however, very difficult to avoid mixed ability grouping for in-sessional courses. Overall, there is very little difference between the number of ways in which the pre-sessional course and individual language learning had helped. European and Latin American

students had found individual language learning to be more useful, which is not surprising, particularly as so few of them had attended the pre-sessional course. On the other hand, the South Asians and Africans, most of whom had not done any individual language learning, had a clear preference for the pre-sessional course. It would seem, from these responses, that the most effective language support an institution could offer would be a pre-sessional course, a limited number of in-sessional courses and a great deal of support during the year for students involved in individual language learning. This gives an added justification to what I have advocated elsewhere, but for different reasons (Blue 1981).

Table 8: **MEAN NUMBER OF WAYS IN WHICH VARIOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING ACTIVITIES HAVE HELPED**

	Pre-Sessional Course	In-Sessional Classes	Individual Language Learning
Europe/Latin America	3.8	2.2	4.8
South Asia/Africa	5.3	2.3	4.5
East and South East Asia	5.3	2.9	5.4
Middle East	3.8	3.0	3.5
TOTAL	4.7	2.4	4.6

In terms of specific skills, the pre-sessional course helped most in the area of everyday listening, followed by writing for academic purposes, everyday speaking, listening for academic purposes and study skills. In-sessional courses were most helpful in developing academic writing skills, then everyday listening, everyday speaking, listening for academic purposes and everyday writing. Individual language learning had been found most helpful in developing everyday listening skills, followed by everyday speaking, listening and reading for academic purposes and everyday reading. Interestingly then, language classes would appear to be more useful for developing skills, whilst individual learning is perceived to be more suited to developing reading strategies and to learning language through reading. Overall though, students were most conscious of their improvement in everyday listening, followed by speaking in everyday contexts and listening for academic purposes.

LIFE IN THE U.K.

One aim of this study was to discover how students spent their time and consequently how much exposure to English they received and how much time they spent in productive language use. They were asked how much time they had spent on a number of different activities both on the previous day and on a typical day. The reason for including the previous day was that it was felt that the answers to the question about a typical day would then be more firmly rooted in reality.

Table 9 shows the length of time typically spent listening to the radio, watching television, etc. Overall, 35.2% of respondents spent one hour or less per day receiving language input in this way, whilst slightly over half spent one to three hours. The South Asians and Africans spent the least time listening to the media, while the East and South East Asians spent the most. Respondents spent rather less time reading for pleasure or for general information (Table 10), 70.1% spending

one hour or less per day on this. Once again, the East and South East Asians spent rather more time than the others reading for pleasure, whereas the South Asians and Africans spent rather less. It would be interesting to compare these figures with those for British students. They are certainly very low compared with the British population as a whole.

Table 9: **TIME SPENT LISTENING TO THE RADIO, WATCHING TV, ETC. – TYPICAL DAY**

	Mean (hours)	‹1 hour	1.1–3 hours	3.1–5 hours	›5 hours
Europe/Latin America	1.9	43.2%	45.9%	8.1%	2.7%
South Asia/Africa	1.4	40.0%	60.0%	0%	0%
East and South East Asia	2.3	21.7%	65.2%	8.7%	4.3%
Middle East	2.1	30.8%	46.2%	23.1%	0%

Table 10: **TIME SPENT READING FOR PLEASURE – TYPICAL DAY**

	Mean (hours)	‹1 hour	1.1–3 hours	3.1–5 hours	›5 hours
Europe/Latin America	0.8	74.3%	25.7%	—	—
South Asia/Africa	0.7	73.3%	26.7%	—	—
East and South East Asia	1.3	65.2%	30.4%	4.3%	—
Middle East	0.9	64.3%	35.7%	—	—

When we come to look at reading connected with students' academic studies (Table 11), a very different picture emerges. The mean number of hours spent by all respondents in this activity was 5.0, but there was a considerable variation from the Middle Eastern mean of 3.9 hours to the South Asian and African mean of 8.3 hours per day. Indeed, 25% of South Asians and Africans claimed that they spent over ten hours per day reading for their academic studies, while a small number from each of the other groups spent one hour or less.

Table 11: **TIME SPENT READING FOR ACADEMIC STUDIES – TYPICAL DAY**

	Mean (hours)	‹1 hour	1.1–3 hours	3.1–5 hours	›5 hours
Europe/Latin America	4.2	5.7%	42.9%	25.7%	25.7%
South Asia/Africa	8.3	0%	6.3%	18.8%	75.0%
East and South East Asia	4.4	4.3%	26.1%	39.1%	30.4%
Middle East	3.9	14.3%	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%

Another aim of the study was to try and discover something about the social framework within which overseas and EEC students operated and a number of questions were designed to elicit this information. Table 12 shows how much time respondents thought they spent speaking English with people from the UK on a typical day. Although a number of students have clearly integrated very well into the host community, it is a cause of some concern that 43.4% considered that they spent one hour or less per day speaking English with British people, especially as some said that they spent no time at all or a mere five to ten minutes in this kind of professional or social interaction. Contrary to expectations, they generally spent rather less time speaking English with other non-native speakers (Table 13), 62.2% considering that they spent one hour or less per day using English in this way. However, the majority of students did not seem to spend a disproportionate amount of time speaking their native language (Table 14). Three of the four groups spent less time speaking their own language than speaking English with British people and only the East and South East Asians spent more time speaking their native language, which may be partly explained by the fact that nearly 30% of them had their spouses and, in some cases, their children with them.

Table 12: **TIME SPENT SPEAKING ENGLISH WITH PEOPLE FROM THE U.K. – TYPICAL DAY**

	Mean (hours)	‹1 hour	1.1–3 hours	3.1–5 hours	›5 hours
Europe/Latin America	2.2	37.1%	48.6%	2.9%	11.4%
South Asia/Africa	2.1	56.3%	25.0%	12.5%	6.3%
East and South East Asia	2.5	47.6%	33.3%	9.5%	9.5%
Middle East	2.7	36.4%	45.5%	—	18.2%

Table 13: **TIME SPENT SPEAKING ENGLISH WITH OTHER NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS – TYPICAL DAY**

	Mean (hours)	‹1 hour	1.1–3 hours	3.1–5 hours	›5 hours
Europe/Latin America	1.4	54.5%	36.4%	9.1%	—
South Asia/Africa	1.2	75.0%	18.8%	—	6.3%
East and South East Asia	1.4	52.4%	42.9%	4.8%	—
Middle East	1.2	83.3%	8.3%	—	8.3%

Table 14: **TIME SPENT SPEAKING NATIVE LANGUAGE – TYPICAL DAY**

	Mean (hours)	‹1 hour	1.1–3 hours	3.1–5 hours	›5 hours
Europe/Latin America	2.0	54.5%	24.2%	12.1%	9.1%
South Asia/Africa	2.0	57.1%	28.6%	—	14.3%
East and South East Asia	3.5	36.4%	27.3%	13.6%	22.7%
Middle East	1.9	33.3%	50.0%	16.7%	—

If we add together the mean amounts of time spent by the East and South East Asian group in various speaking activities, listening to the media and reading for pleasure, we arrive at a total of eleven hours per day. This creates a slightly false impression, since some of the activities may have been taking place concurrently. Nevertheless, we are left with a picture of the East and South East Asians as a very sociable group, making a great deal of use of language. However, they do not begin to compare with one Pakistani student, who claimed that he spent two hours a day watching television, listening to the radio, etc., two hours a day reading for pleasure or for general information, eight to ten hours a day reading for his academic studies, twelve hours a day speaking with people from the UK, eight hours a day speaking English with other non-native speakers and twelve hours a day speaking his native language – a total of forty-four to forty-six hours a day. Even allowing for some overlap of activities occurring simultaneously, one wonders whether there can have been any time left for sleep!

In order to approach the question of social integration in a different way, the questionnaire asked what proportion of students' friends in Southampton came from the UK (Table 15) and what was the nationality and native language of their three best friends in Southampton (Table 16). In every group there were some individuals who had more than 50% of their friends from the UK, but only among the Europeans and Latin Americans was this a common phenomenon. It is sad to report that half of the South Asians and Africans, perhaps largely because of their age, felt that they had no British friends at all, although they had clearly forged some close friendships with other overseas students of different language backgrounds. The Middle Eastern students and the East and South Asians had established nearly half of their friendships among other speakers of their own language, but overall they had managed to maintain a spread of British and international friends.

Table 15: **PROPORTION OF FRIENDS FROM THE U.K.**

	None	‹30%	31–50%	51–70%	›70%	All
Europe/Latin America	—	36.1%	22.2%	27.8%	13.9%	—
South Asia/Africa	50.0%	37.5%	6.3%	—	—	6.3%
East and South East Asia	12.5%	41.7%	29.2%	8.3%	8.3%	—
Middle East	7.1%	57.1%	7.1%	14.3%	14.3%	—
TOTAL	13.3%	41.1%	18.9%	15.6%	10.0%	1.1%

Table 16: **NATIVE LANGUAGE OF THREE BEST FRIENDS IN SOUTHAMPTON**

	Same as Respondent's Native Language	Another Foreign Language	English
Europe/Latin America	29.5%	30.5%	40.0%
South Asia/Africa	37.0%	43.5%	19.6%
East and South East Asia	46.8%	35.5%	17.7%
Middle East	47.4%	34.2%	18.4%
TOTAL	37.8%	34.7%	27.5%

It was hypothesized that there might be a relationship between the amount of time spent using English in academic and social interaction and the improvement which students felt they had made in English. They were, therefore, asked how much they thought their language had improved since the beginning of the academic year (Table 17). Overall, 67.0% felt that their English had improved 'quite a lot' and most progress was noticed in the oral/aural skills. However, whereas 89.2% of Europeans felt that their English had improved a great deal or quite a lot, as many as 35.3% of South Asians and Africans felt that they had only improved a little or that they had not made any progress at all. This seems to correspond quite closely to the percentage of British friends and the amount of time spent speaking English with people from the UK.

Table 17: **IMPROVEMENT IN ENGLISH SINCE OCTOBER**

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A little	None at all
Europe/Latin America	18.9%	70.3%	10.8%	—
South Asia/Africa	17.6%	47.1%	23.5%	11.8%
East and South East Asia	8.7%	69.6%	21.7%	—
Middle East	7.1%	78.6%	14.3%	—

Students were asked what factors had help them to improve their English (Table 18) and what had prevented them from improving as much as they would have liked (Table 19). Whilst formal language learning was not discounted, listening to native speakers was generally considered to be the most effective aid to language improvement. On the negative side, too much work for the main course of study was considered to be the main impediment to continued language learning and this was cited by twice as many respondents as not making friends with native speakers.

Table 18: **FACTORS THAT HAVE HELPED LANGUAGE IMPROVEMENT**

1. Talking to native speakers ..... (78)
2. Listening to the radio, watching TV, etc. ..... (68)
3. Attending lectures, seminars, etc. in department ..... (61)
4. Attending in-sessional English classes ..... (38)
5. Individual language learning ..... (33)
6. Talking to other non-native speakers ..... (32)
7. Their own positive attitudes ..... (30)
8. Sympathetic staff in University department ..... (29)

Table 19: **FACTORS THAT HAVE HINDERED LANGUAGE IMPROVEMENT**

1. Too much work for the main course of study ..... (58)
2. Not making friends with native speakers ..... (29)
3. Sickness ..... (4)

ACADEMIC STUDIES

Students were asked in which department they were studying and at what level. Overall, 42.4% were in the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, with a further 20.7% in the Faculty of Science. The remainder were scattered across the Faculties of Arts, Law, Social Sciences, Mathematics, Educational Studies and Medicine. 52.2% were following a taught Master's course and 25.6% were registered for a research degree. The remainder were undergraduates, visiting European students, visiting staff and postgraduate visitors not registered for a degree. These figures are quite normal for the University of Southampton, although they feature a recent increase in the number of visiting and exchange students from Europe, mostly here under ERASMUS and similar schemes.

The questionnaire asked how students felt about their ability to cope with the language demands of various academic activities (Table 20). By the middle of the academic year, they felt most confident about their ability to understand textbooks and journals, followed by their ability to understand lectures. Interestingly, they were still relatively unsure about their ability to read at an adequate speed and to take notes from lectures. They generally felt far less confident about their productive skills and cited participating in seminars and writing essays, reports, thesis, etc. as the two areas where they were least sure of their ability. However, writing original material was considered by the majority of respondents to be 'very important', while participating in seminars was generally only considered to be 'quite important'. This would seem then to confirm the view commonly held that writing should be the major focus for in-sessional courses and individual support at this stage in the academic year. This overall pattern, incidentally, corresponds very closely with Geoghegan's findings (1983, p.132–136).

Table 20: **PRESENT ABILITY TO COPE WITH LANGUAGE DEMANDS OF VARIOUS ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES**

	Confident	OK	Unsure
Understanding lectures	45	41	4
Taking notes from lectures	29	43	16
Participating in seminars	16	44	30
Discussing with supervisor in individual supervisions	31	42	14
Understanding textbooks and journals	58	30	1
Reading at adequate speed	25	40	20
Making adequate notes on reading	32	50	6
Understanding instructions for practical work	32	40	7
Writing essays, reports, etc.	19	48	22

Taking the questionnaires as a whole, one gains the impression that most of these overseas and EEC students work extremely hard. Indeed, their academic studies seem to dominate their lives in a way which would not be true for most British students. This leads, in some cases, to a certain degree of social isolation and yet most respondents seemed to feel that almost any amount of sacrifice would be worthwhile if it enabled them to succeed in their studies. Of course, the average age of these

students is considerably higher than for British students and many of them are in mid-career and feel the pressure to succeed very intensely. Failure, in some cases, could cause great difficulty and loss of face on their return to their home country. One Pakistani student explained his problems as follows:

> "When overseas students come to UK, they are all the time worried about their academic course ... But, due to language problem, it becomes difficult for them to understand such vast subjects from a different area within minimum available time. So they are all the time worried and tense, due to which they are unable to spend a comfortable life in UK."

On the other hand, many other students are very confident about their studies and are obviously enjoying academic life to the full, especially when they are also well integrated socially.

CONCLUSION

It is very difficult to draw any useful conclusions from a study that has touched on so many different areas. One of the more striking facts to emerge was the great diversity of responses, indicating an enormous variety of different experiences. The degree of integration varies very considerably and this has been seen to correspond fairly closely to improvement perceived in oral/aural skills, although improvement in writing skills can be seen to be more closely linked to formal study (in-sessional and pre-sessional courses). Generally, there is a desire for more contact with native speakers of English and it is probably true to say that, for most overseas and EEC students, studying in the UK would be a more enriching and positive experience in every way if there were more social and academic contacts with native speakers. The fact that such a high percentage of students took the time to respond to a fairly daunting questionnaire attests to the interest that the project aroused. It is my hope that the information gleaned and continued discussion of the issues will actually help to improve the quality of students' total experience of studying in the UK.

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